

E-LEARNING COURSE



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**FEAT-DS: Electronics and Employability
Advancement for Adults with Down Syndrome**

WP2 - Up-skilling adult educators

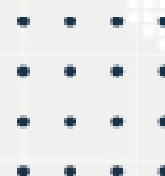


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Module 2

**Social Inclusion through Art
and Manual Skills**





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Overview

The module on social inclusion through art and manual skills is designed to teach educators how to use art and manual activities to promote social inclusion and personal development for adults with Down syndrome.



Introduction

In today's modern world, we encounter more challenges that often lead to stressful situations. This is amplified because of our multicultural societies which bring a strong added value and perspectives. However, sometimes it is uncomfortable due to the formation of smaller racial groups which leads sometimes to isolation of individuals. The idea of this module is how we can integrate people and include situations to be able to cultivate a more inclusive society benefiting by using creative and artistic methods in our work. We aimed to impart the knowledge and skills needed to organize and implement programs to foster social inclusion and ensure intercultural understanding.



Aim

- o Teach educators how to use art and manual activities to promote social inclusion and personal development of adults with Down syndrome

Expected Outcomes

- o Enhanced understanding of down syndrome
- o Development of fine manual skills
- o Using art as a tool for confidence growth
- o Strengthen social bonds
- o Holistic development of participants



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Chapter 1: Introduction to Social Inclusion and Art

Key Points:

- Empowerment through Art: Art helps marginalized individuals feel seen and valued by reflecting their experiences and identities in public and creative spaces.
- Creating Accessible Art Spaces: Inclusivity requires designing art activities and environments where everyone can participate, regardless of ability.
- Building Community and Reducing Stigma: By engaging with diverse art forms, participants can challenge societal biases and contribute to stronger community bonds.

Inclusion Tools of art

Art and design can meaningfully contribute to social change. It can shift debates, change perspectives, raise awareness, and act upon visible and invisible mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of different agents occupying the public sphere. In this thematic issue we invited authors to relate to this claim as they preferred: by bringing evidence to support it, refute it, or simply to discuss the potential benefits and harms of artistically inspired and design related interventions in citizens' living environment. We challenged authors to rethink agency and engage theoretically or empirically with how art and design installations act upon us, citizens, and vice-versa. The result is a compilation of different storylines, coming from different geographical parts of the world and written from a variety of cultural perspectives. What binds these contributions is a true commitment to open a space for those experiencing challenging life circumstances to access, occupy, or transform the public sphere. Our collective engagement with concepts such as power, prejudice, harassment or discrimination was not focused on erasing differences. Instead, we engaged with the idea that certain differences should matter less than they currently do in creating a safe and accessible public space for all.

Impacts of the arts on social inclusion

As discussed above, social exclusion refers to the complex or 'multiplier' effects of social and economic disadvantage. While the importance of responding to social exclusion is increasingly accepted amongst policymakers, practitioners and academics, there is limited consensus around the actual indicators of social inclusion. In this review, I will draw on an adaptation of Long et al. (2002), whose work on dimensions of social inclusion through culture, media and sport in the UK has identified seven indicators of social inclusion outcomes as:

- improved educational performance and participation¹
- increased employment rates
- reduced levels of crime
- better (and more equal) standards of health
- enhanced personal development
- improved social cohesion and reduced social isolation²
- active citizenship.



Improved educational performance

The relationship between educational attainment and participation in the arts has been widely debated by the academic community (Matarasso 1997). The present review of the literature revealed a fairly limited, yet generally positive account of the relationship between performance and retention in formal education and participation in the arts. In an evaluation involving a random selection of participants in a 'learning by art' program implemented within more than 30 schools in Portsmouth, England, Matarasso found that participating in the arts had a positive impact on the educational performance of three out of every four children.



Improved social cohesion and reduced social isolation

Social capital theory suggests that the strength and diversity of personal and community networks is a significant feature of resilient communities. At an individual level, people with diverse personal networks have been found to be in relatively better physical and mental health, have higher sustained levels of education and employment and greater sources of social support than those with very limited networks. At a community level, communities with higher aggregate levels of social capital are more likely to exhibit features of community self-reliance and have greater access to diverse resources, thus being able to respond to the structural and historical effects of exclusion.

Art and Design: A Catalyst for Promoting Diversity and Inclusivity

Art and design play a crucial role in promoting diversity and inclusivity. Through the creative expression of different perspectives, art and design can help challenge and break down stereotypes, provide a platform for marginalized voices, and foster understanding and empathy among other groups.

In an increasingly interconnected and diverse world, art and design are more important than ever to reflect and celebrate this diversity. Art and design can provide a visual language for exploring and expressing the complexities of identity, culture, and experience. By showcasing the work of diverse artists and designers, we can expand our understanding of the world and challenge our own biases and preconceptions.

Furthermore, art and design can serve as a catalyst for positive social change. Through the power of storytelling and visual communication, art and design can inspire and mobilize people to take action on important issues such as racism,

discrimination, and inequality. Artists and designers can play a vital role in promoting diversity and inclusion by using their platforms to amplify marginalized voices and raise awareness about pressing social issues.

In conclusion, art and design are essential for promoting diversity and inclusivity. By providing a platform for diverse perspectives and experiences, art and design can challenge stereotypes, foster understanding, and inspire positive social change. We can create a more inclusive and equitable world by supporting and celebrating diverse artists and designers.

Chapter 2: Understanding Down Syndrome: Cognitive and Social Characteristics

What causes Down syndrome?

Down syndrome is a common genetic condition that occurs when a child has an extra copy of chromosome 21.

Chromosomes are structures inside every human cell that contain DNA. These tiny structures that children inherit from their parents play a key role in determining how a baby develops, for instance, whether they will be tall or short, have dark or light skin, or curly or straight hair.

What are the symptoms of Down syndrome?

Down syndrome can affect children physically, cognitively, and behaviorally. Every child with the condition is unique and may possess the following characteristics to different degrees, or not at all.

Physical characteristics

- Children with Down syndrome have some of the following physical features:
- Eyes that slant upward, from inner corner to outer corner
- Small ears that may fold over slightly at the top
- A smaller-than-average mouth, and larger appearing tongue
- A smaller-than-average nose, with a flattened nasal bridge
- Short, stocky arms and legs
- A wide space between the big toe and second toe
- Short necks and small hands with short fingers
- One single crease that goes straight across the palm, and a second crease that curves down by the thumb, rather than three creases in the palm of the hand
- Shorter-than-average height
- Low muscle tone (hypotonia) throughout the body and excessively loose joints



Psychosocial & Cognitive Development of Those with Down Syndrome

"Sophia's Masterpiece: Artist with Downs Syndrome in High Demand"

Cognitive Characteristics

People with Down syndrome experience mild to moderate intellectual disability. While cognitive development is slower compared to peers, individuals with Down syndrome can learn and acquire skills, though it often takes more time and support. Here are a few key cognitive features:

1. **Delayed Development:** Intellectual milestones, such as walking, talking, and problem-solving, are typically delayed. For example, many children with Down syndrome may start talking later than their peers.
2. **Learning Style:** Children with Down syndrome tend to be visual learners. They often respond well to visual aids like pictures, charts, and hands-on activities.
3. **Memory:** Short-term memory can be a challenge. Retaining new information, especially abstract concepts, may be harder.
4. **Speech and Language:** While language development is typically delayed, many individuals with Down syndrome develop strong language skills over time.

Social Characteristics

People with Down syndrome often display strong social connections and emotional understanding. Their ability to form relationships and engage with others is a major strength, though challenges in social understanding can still occur:

1. **Emotional Expression:** Individuals with Down syndrome are often more expressive than their peers.
2. **Social Cues and Behavior:** Though emotionally open, understanding social cues—like tone of voice or body language—can be a challenge.
3. **Friendships:** With support, individuals with Down syndrome can form meaningful and lasting friendships. They may be more likely to interact with others in a warm, sincere way, though some may need help navigating complex social situations or handling conflicts in relationships.
4. **Behavioral Traits:** Some people with Down syndrome experience behaviors associated with impulse control issues, such as acting out or having difficulty managing frustration. Positive reinforcement, clear routines, and behavior therapy can help with managing these traits.

Chapter 3: Art as a tool for social connection

Art is a powerful tool for social change, and it can capture people's attention and inspire them to actual actions. It occurs by employing art to address social and political issues, connect communities, and encourage sustainability. Socially engaged art can positively stimulate social change if steered in the right direction. It has the power to change narratives by initiating vital conversations and discussions through the message it conveys. Art can be employed to increase awareness of social issues and promote positive change in society. Historically artists used their art to articulate political and social issues for example, in United States during the civil rights movement artists created powerful art that challenged the prevailing political and social structures of the time.

Using art as a tool has many benefits such as bringing people from different backgrounds together and creating a sense of shared experience and knowledge. It can also be used to reveal the stories of marginalized communities, giving them a platform to share their perspectives and challenges. Another benefit is that art can be utilized to highlight the effect of people's activities on environmental and sustainability issues and inspire them to protect the earth.



Art has emerged as a potent tool for fostering social connectedness and reducing loneliness, particularly among older adults.

The significance of participatory arts in strengthening relationships, enhancing self-worth, and promoting feelings of belonging. Community-engaged art programs have been shown to facilitate reciprocal relationships among older adults, caregivers, and the wider community.



Empowering Artists as Agents of Change

Throughout history, artists have used their creativity to address social and political issues, raise awareness, and inspire change. From Shakespeare's plays to contemporary murals, art has been a powerful tool for social justice. Artists like Hassani, who uses her platform to speak out against women's oppression, demonstrate the impact art can have on promoting social change.



Public Art as a Tool for Social Justice

Public art has been instrumental in reshaping public narratives of justice and challenging historical invisibility. In Alabama, artists are depicting honest histories, countering a legacy of erasure, and shaping public sentiment. The Black Arts Movement and its contemporary manifestations, such as the Black Lives Matter murals, demonstrate the artistic lineage of social justice movements.

Collaborative Art Ideas

Here are a few collaborative art ideas for when your students need a change of pace. For example, after a long lesson or a project that requires a lot of focus and concentration, a collaborative lesson is a perfect reset. They give students a chance to think quickly, be creative, and most of all – collaborate! Not only does collaboration help prepare them for the real world, but these activities end up being some of my students' favorite lessons.

Paint Swap

I like to do this activity after we finish a painting lesson and we have leftover paint. I give each student a piece of tagboard. The students paint a base painting or underpainting. I encourage students to apply in a thin layer so it dries quickly. While it is drying, I explain the directions. They pass their painting to the next student and the that student gets five minutes to add to the painting, but not cover or erase what others have added. I remind them to keep an open mind and not dictate how they want their painting to look in the end. That is the fun part. Provide students with a

variety of paint brushes and tools and set a timer every 5 minutes. Once they have swapped 4 times, the original owner gets their turn to add to their painting. This is my favorite of the collaborative art ideas!

Chopped: Art Edition

Students work in table groups for this challenge. Similar to the tv show, I give students a basket of ingredients with materials to create a sculpture (aka. junk found in my art room). I give them a time limit and access to other materials and tools to create their sculptures. Usually, I give them two class periods and in the third class period we announce the winner. I select a winner using the following criteria: originality/creativity, craftsmanship, use of basket ingredients and teamwork/collaboration. My students really enjoy working together and stay very focused because of the time limit. The energy and excitement is high with this activity.



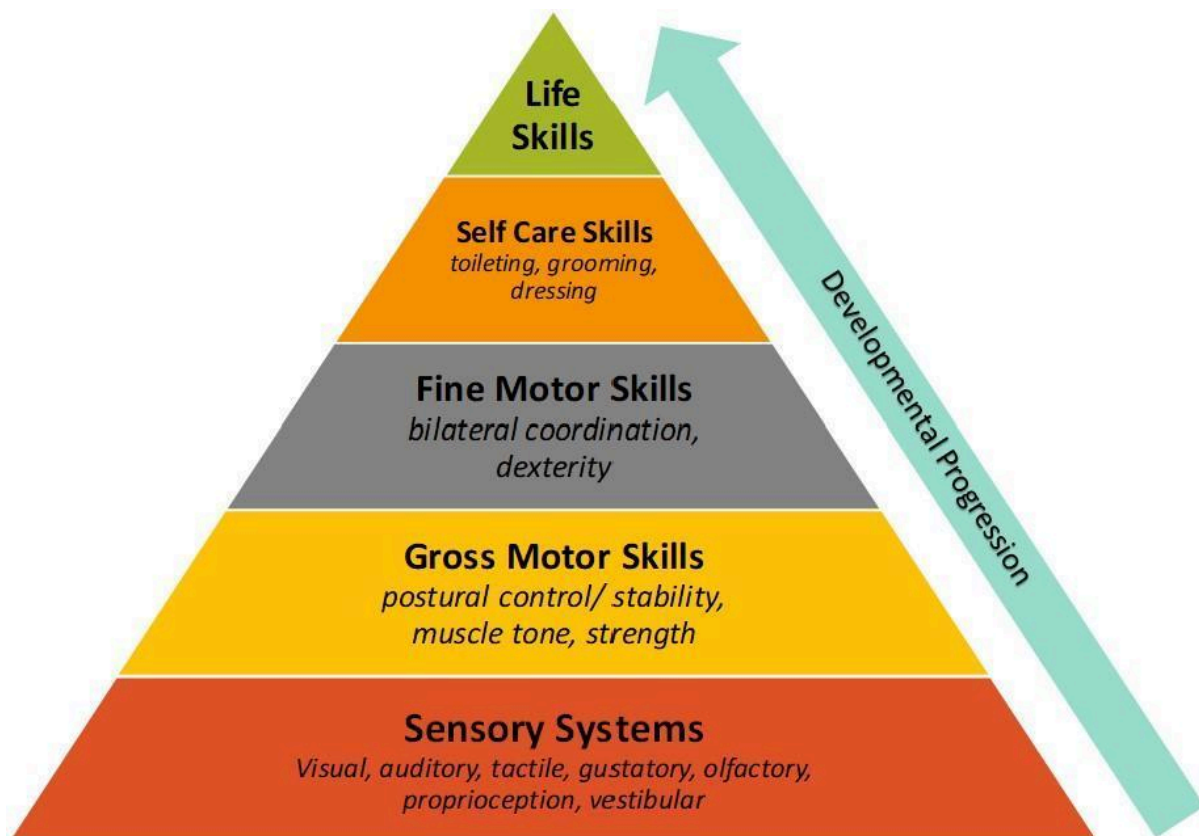
Toothpick Sculptures

This works best with three or less artists to a group. Students make a series of Model Magic spheres and allow them to dry. They can make them colorful with markers if desired. Next the students create tetrahedrons, similar to pyramids. The students dip the toothpicks into liquid glue before sticking them into the spheres. They create several tetrahedrons then work together to join them with additional toothpicks and make their sculpture grow. You can make this a contest of the tallest sculpture or the most creative. The results are fun and the kids are totally engaged and working collaboratively.

Chapter 4: Developing motor skills through manual activities for people with disabilities with down syndrome

Motor/manual skills refer to performing functional tasks through small movements of the hands, wrists, and fingers, and include activities such as:

- Drawing and printing
- Cutting with scissors
- Working with fasteners, such as buttons or zippers
- Eating with utensils



The building blocks of fine motor development are:

1. Tactile perception
2. Postural control
3. Bilateral coordination
4. Dexterity

Tactile Perception

Tactile perception involves sensory receptors sending information to the brain about what we are feeling and touching. This includes light touch, pressure, vibration, temperature, and pain. Touch sensation enables us to feel things and understand what we feel, making it an important component of fine motor development.



Postural Control

Postural control refers to our ability to sustain an upright position for sitting, standing, and performing functional tasks. Low muscle tone, decreased strength and hypermobility (prevalent in children with Down syndrome) reduce postural control. For children with Down syndrome, these physical factors make it more difficult to stabilize to meet the demands of an activity. A stable base of support allows one to coordinate the effective movement of the arms, hands, and fingers. Postural control is important for effective writing, drawing, and cutting skills. It also supports us in

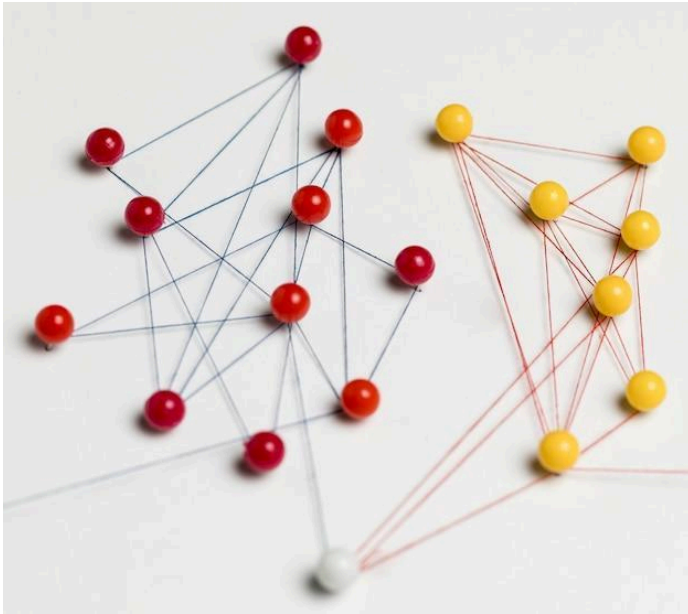
sitting upright in a chair, sitting cross-legged on the floor, and using an appropriate amount of pressure when holding a pencil and pressing down on paper.



Bilateral Coordination

Bilateral coordination refers to the ability to coordinate both sides of the body simultaneously in a controlled and organized manner. Stabilizing paper with one hand while writing/cutting with the other is an example. Good bilateral integration/coordination indicates that both sides of the brain are communicating effectively and sharing information. This supports an awareness of the two sides of the body, selection of one side as dominant, and the ability to discriminate between our left and right sides. The developmental trajectory of bilateral coordination generally progresses through the following stages:

1. Gross Symmetric Bilateral Skills – holding objects with two hands, clapping, banging things together
2. Stabilizing object(s) with one hand while manipulating with the other, like holding a container with one hand while putting something in it with the other
3. Complementary two hand use where objects are manipulated with both hands simultaneously



Dexterity

Dexterity refers to skillful, precise, and efficient hand movements. It is important for functional tasks such as dressing, feeding, and school-related activities (i.e. printing, coloring, and cutting). It comes into play in several ways:

- Grasp (pencil or utensil use)
- Finger control and coordination
- Hand and wrist movements

The muscles of the hands need to manipulate small things effectively. They also need to have enough strength to grasp objects. Being able to rotate the wrist is important for positioning the hand for functional skills, such as writing and drawing



Chapter 5: Designing Art Projects for Diverse Abilities



Adapting Materials and Techniques

When it comes to materials and techniques, **think outside the box**. If traditional brushes or tools aren't working for someone, try experimenting with sponges, oversized brushes, or even their hands! For someone with limited fine motor skills, using larger, easier-to-handle materials can make a world of difference. For instance, clay projects can be made more accessible by providing tools that allow participants to shape and mold with less pressure, or by letting them use stamps or patterns instead of fine carving tools.

You can also adapt techniques to match different ability levels. Let's say you're doing a craft project involving weaving. Some participants might do traditional weaving with yarn and needles, while others could use a loom with larger openings or even weave with strips of fabric. The key is to **focus on the process rather than perfection**. By sharing stories of how each adapted technique is just a different way to express creativity, you can help build confidence and encourage participants to take pride in their unique contributions.

Objective Through Storytelling

By weaving stories into your project design—stories about how different cultures have used various materials or how artists throughout history have adapted techniques—you're not only making the activity more engaging but also showing how differences in ability can enhance creativity. These stories can help participants see their adaptations as a creative advantage rather than a limitation, turning the project into a shared narrative of exploration and self-expression.

Chapter 6: Implementing Group Art Activities

Facilitating Collaborative Projects

The main important aspect to group art activities is **highlighting the need for a shared purpose**. The project itself should be something that excites the group, a communal sculpture, or even a series of paintings that come together to form a bigger picture, where everyone is adding a certain element to bring it to life as a collab work. The goal is that every participant feels like they're contributing to the final outcome. **This is especially meaningful in inclusive environments, where individuals of all abilities—including colleagues with Down syndrome—are actively encouraged to contribute their unique ideas and talents to the shared vision.**



As the facilitator, your duty is to guide the process without taking control or influence the decisions. Let the group **bounce ideas off each other**. Maybe one person has a vision for a particular color scheme while someone else is focused on shapes or textures. **By creating space for neurodiverse perspectives and communication styles you** gather these ideas together by fostering discussion and brainstorming. The magic happens when participants start seeing how their ideas can connect with others to create something bigger than what they'd imagined on their own.

In storytelling terms, you're the narrator, helping participants see themselves as part of a **collective narrative**. Each brushstroke, each contribution, becomes a plot point in a larger story they're all telling together. **When inclusivity is woven into that story, the result is not only a richer piece of art—but a stronger, more empathetic and inclusive team.** This makes the process not just about the art, but about the connections being built along the way.



Encouraging Peer Interaction and Support

Group art activities offer a fantastic way for participants to **learn from each other**. Maybe someone is really skilled with a particular technique, and another person is just learning. You can encourage more experienced participants to show others how to do things, sparking natural peer support.





You can also set up parts of the project that require collaboration—like having two people work together on blending colors or creating a pattern. This not only encourages interaction but helps build trust and empathy within the group. It's about making sure the environment feels safe for everyone to express their ideas, offer help, and receive it too. **It's especially powerful when everybody is included, such as colleagues with Down syndrome, as it fosters mutual respect and understanding through shared creativity.** . It's about making sure the environment feels safe for everyone to express their ideas, offer help, and receive it too. **By designing activities that are inclusive and accessible, the environment becomes a safe space where everyone can express ideas, offer help, and receive it, while celebrating diverse strengths and perspectives.**

Through storytelling, you can frame the project as a journey where the participants are the **heroes supporting one another**. You can share examples of famous art collaborations or teams that have worked together to create something amazing, showing how teamwork and peer support can elevate an idea to new heights.

Success Celebrations Matter

Celebrating accomplishments promotes staff morale and motivation. It also helps employees feel that they are part of a team that sees and values them. . **In group art activities, this recognition becomes even more meaningful, especially when individuals of all abilities—including those with Down syndrome—are involved and celebrated for their creative contributions.** Why do success celebrations matter so much?

- **Promotes a happy work environment:** Productivity and employee happiness depend on a happy workplace. Celebrating accomplishments improves the workplace for everyone. **In an inclusive art-based setting, acknowledging each person's role in a collaborative piece fosters joy, belonging, and purpose and recognizing the unique strengths of a diverse team fosters a sense of belonging for everyone.**
- **Encourages innovation:** Celebrating accomplishments can drive people to think creatively and solve problems. When employees see their ideas acknowledged, they share and create more. **This is especially true in creative environments, where diverse perspectives—such as those from**

people with Down syndrome, enhance the richness and originality of the artistic process.

- **Excellent teamwork:** Celebrations allow team members to bond and share experiences. Long-term teamwork definitely benefits from this bonding. Collaborative art projects, in particular, promote connection and empathy when everyone is encouraged to contribute according to their strengths and interests.
- **You attract good people:** Success-driven companies recruit and retain great people. Positive and festive cultures attract more apt candidates. A workplace or group that celebrates social inclusion through creative and manual projects sends a clear message that it values diversity, collaboration, and human connection.

Some Innovative and Inclusive Ways to Celebrate Success in the Workplace with the use of art



- **Collaborative Mural of Achievement:** Create a large-scale mural where each team member paints or adds a piece representing their contribution to a project or goal. Ensure the process is guided, accessible, and supported—using stencils, textured materials, or adaptive tools so employees with Down syndrome can fully participate. The mural becomes a permanent celebration of teamwork and inclusion.

- **“Patchwork of Success” Textile Art:** Have each employee decorate a fabric square with symbols of their accomplishments (e.g., embroidery, painting, collage). Stitch them together into a “success quilt” or wall hanging. It’s tactile, visual, and allows different communication styles to shine, making it perfect for inclusive teams.
- **Recognition Through Personalised Art Gifts:** Commission local artists with disabilities or team members to create custom art pieces as celebration gifts. These could be portraits, stylized certificates, or decorative plaques acknowledging team or individual successes. Highlight artists with Down syndrome when possible—amplifying inclusivity through who creates and receives the art.
- **Art Gallery Celebration:** Host a “Success Through Our Eyes” exhibit where employees create artworks reflecting their roles or milestones. Curate the exhibit in a shared space (or virtually), and host a celebration night with music, speeches, and community invitations. Include pieces by neurodivergent and disabled artists, reinforcing that all contributions are valuable.



Activity: Brush Strokes

Themes/Issues addressed: Team building, reconnection, art expression

Target group:



People with difficulties (down syndrome or in verbal communication (shy, Closed, facing psychological and emotional difficulties etc.)

Aims and Objectives:

- To create a connection between participants
- To give them possibility to express their inner state with colors
- To see how they feel in a group where they need to create something common in silence
- To reveal difficulties in team work

Learning outcomes:

- Team building
- Challenges in work with other people comparing to the individual work
- Finding compromise
- Understanding and trusting each other
- Releasing tension and expression emotions through art

Group size: 4-5 ppl

Time: 40 min.

Instructions:

Participants work in small groups; 4-5 people in each group maximum.

Needed materials are flip chart papers and colour pencils, also can be gouache instead of pencils

but not at the same time. The task is to make a group drawing. Each participant is allowed to

use only 2 colours and once they choose colours they cannot change it. They can't exchange pencils

with others from their team either. Another rule is that drawing should be done in silence. Time for





group drawing 20-25 min. Depending on the aim of drawing you can give different instructions. If

your aim is team building you can say that you expect the drawing to be as harmonic as possible

(like it was done by 1 person). If you want to have this technique for diagnostics in group relations

better not to specify what you expect as a result.

Debriefing and evaluation:

- What was the most challenging?
- What was the easiest part?
- How did you choose the topic?
- Do you think we worked as a team, or everyone was doing its own thing?
- Was it comfortable to work in silence?
- What emotion is dominant after this activity?
- Why do you think each had only 2 colours? What is the metaphor behind it?

Space requirements and training materials:

A space where each small group can find their place not to disturb each other.

Materials: Big papers (e.g. flipchart), colourful pencils or other colouring materials



Conclusion

In summary, this module on using art as a tool for social inclusion focuses on fostering creativity, collaboration, and personal development for adults with Down syndrome. By planning inclusive group projects, adapting materials and techniques, and encouraging peer interaction, educators can create a supportive environment that empowers participants to express themselves. Through activities like collaborative murals, learners develop fine motor skills, build self-confidence, and strengthen social bonds. The main goal is to celebrate individual contributions while promoting a sense of community, ensuring that everyone feels valued and included in the creative process.

Further Reading

- <https://www.childrenshospital.org/conditions/down-syndrome#:~:text=They%20often%20have%20mild%20to,in%20children%20with%20Down%20syndrome>. This link is to support the understanding of down syndrome, causes and diagnosis as well as what characteristics to take into account dealing with this certain challenge in children and adults
- <https://www.dsrf.org/resources/information/physical-skill-development/fine-motor-development/> - This tool is to identify the fine motor skills development what is necessary to know.
- <https://www.dsrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/OT-Strategies-to-Maximize-Success-in-the-Classroom.pdf> - Strategies to Support Children with Down syndrome in the Classroom
- <https://www.dsrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Positioning-Handout.pdf> - Proper positioning can support kids with Down syndrome to be more independent and



successful at seated tasks such as feeding, toileting, communication, and fine motor tasks.

- https://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/571/1/barraket_arts_social_inclusion_1.pdf - Putting people in the picture? The role of the arts in social inclusion
- <https://www.thrivesparrow.com/blog/employee-engagement-strategy>

